Bobby Morris Playfield Improvements
Playfield Surface Conversion and Related Work
Project Design Ideals Explained

The primary intent of this project is to recover lost use capacity at Bobby Morris Playfield.

Background

Most, if not all, of the capacity that the Parks Department would like to regain was lost as a result of a previous surface conversion project in 1996, which removed a 30+ year old cintrex[1] surface. The conversion installed a hybrid natural/synthetic turf material ("hybrid surface") composed of a woven plastic polymer with short, grass-like synthetic tufting through which natural grass is grown. The short synthetic fibers were intended to protect the natural grass root crown as the turf wears down over the course of a season. In theory, protecting the root crown would allow the individual turf plants to recover from root stock instead of requiring a complete seeded restoration of the worn areas. The project re-used the circa late-1960's subsurface drainage system installed with the cintrex surface.

Although the product was considered technically advanced and had been used successfully elsewhere in the U.S., it was untested in this climate and with the degree of use intended. The product did not meet the expectations of either the users or the Parks Department. The only other field to receive this product, Interbay Soccer Stadium, has already been converted to the infill-type synthetic turf being proposed for Bobby Morris Playfield. That type of surface has been successfully installed at many area ballfields including Parks facilities such as Queen Anne Bowl (our oldest installation, 1998), Genesee Playfield, and Interbay Soccer Stadium; Seattle School District Facilities at Nathan Hale, Ingraham, Sealth, Rainier Beach, and Memorial Stadium (among others); UW facilities including Husky Stadium and several intramural athletic fields; and the Seattle Seahawks Stadium.

The Parks Department accelerated the funding request for the current project in an effort to maximize the return on investment as rapidly as possible. Prior to the 1996 conversion, this site was used for scheduled play approximately 2,000 hours. Following the conversion, use has dropped off by about half (see below). The project that was deferred in favor of Bobby Morris Playfield is Brighton Playfield. By advancing the Bobby Morris project, the Department feels that more field hours and use flexibility are gained.

[1] Cintrex: playfield surfacing material that looks like crushed brick, installed much like a crushed rock path. This material was very abrasive and hard when dry, although during periods of heavy precipitation could also become somewhat muddy.

Bobby Morris Playfield Scheduled Use Statistics, 1981 - Present[2]

1981 – 1,682 Hrs.	1993 – 1,437 Hrs.
1982 – 1,898 Hrs.	1994 – 1,387 Hrs.
1983 – 1,708 Hrs.	1995 – 1,124 Hrs.
1984 - 1,597 Hrs.	1996 - Closed
1985 – 1,756 Hrs.	1997 - 2,062 Hrs.
1986 – 1,655 Hrs.	1998 – 490 Hrs.
1987 – 1,569 Hrs.	1999 – 910 Hrs.
1988 – 1,673 Hrs.	2000 – 805 Hrs.
1989 – 1,756 Hrs.	2001 – 930 Hrs.
1990 - No Data Avail.	2002 – 859 Hrs.
1991 - No Data Avail.	2003 - 1,024 Hrs.
1992 – 1,519 Hrs.	

Design Ideals

As with any project, the Parks Department must ultimately test any proposed design concept against a variety of criteria, and determine to what degree each of these criteria must be maximized. The basic ideals are similar for nearly any project- it is the weight given to each ideal that will vary depending on the type of work proposed. The Bobby Morris Playfield Improvements Project must meet expectations for *Safety, Accessibility, Program Requirements, Maintenance and Durability, Aesthetics, and Landmark Status*. The following explanations are given for each.

Safety

The proposed design must be safe for active users, passive users and the maintainers of the park. In the case of ballfields, this implies that a) the surface and related equipment specifically associated with the intended use should be proven safe; b) the environment or context within which the facility is set should be reasonably free from the potential for conflict between users and non-users, including pedestrians, vehicles, and structures; and c) hazards associated with regular and preventive maintenance of the proposed improvement, if any, should be identified and mitigated integrally with the design of the facility.

Accessibility

In accordance with law, any improvement project must address the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Although the ADA primarily deals with building development, the Federal Government has developed specific guidelines for use with site development and outdoor recreation.[3]

Program Requirements

[2] Statistics provided are raw data that reflect only the Departments approval of a request for scheduling. They do not reflect cancellations due to weather or user cancellation.

[3] This project is subject to most recent revision of the "Regulatory Negotiation Committee on Accessibility Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas".

As previously stated, the primary goal of this project is to recover lost use capacity. As a mixed-use facility serving Baseball, Softball, Soccer, and other organized recreational programs, our ideal is to provide the highest possible level of play given the combination of uses. It is generally recognized that the oldest continuous recreational use here is Baseball, and it is also widely acknowledged that Soccer sees the highest participation by users and scheduled field hours, city-wide. The installation of an infill-type synthetic turf surface is expected to perform as needed, with no anticipated lost time due to weather delays or unmet maintenance requirements. The layout or configuration of the facility should minimize maintenance requirements to the highest degree possible, balanced against the desire for a high-quality play experience for all expected activities.

Maintenance and Durability

It is generally understood that the maintenance requirements for infill-type synthetic turf fields are dramatically lower than for any other surface type used by the Parks Department. All requirements associated with natural grass, i.e., water, fertilizer, pesticides, mowing, thatching, aerating, etc. are eliminated entirely. The challenge is to provide for the multiple uses. Baseball and Softball traditionally incorporate a clay-based soil area around each base, home plate, and the pitchers mound. Keeping this material segregated from the loose infill materials of the synthetic turf, or providing an infill synthetic turf surface appropriate for these activities, is the challenge. Since the success of a project such as this relies very heavily on a material that is supplied and installed by an outside vendor, there should be very serious consideration given to the Contract Specification for this product. Providing properly engineered solutions that accommodate a range of these materials is a critical consideration as well.

Aesthetics

The Parks Department takes very seriously its role as stewards of the public recreation spaces of the city. We believe in our responsibility to keep Seattle beautiful. Beauty, as the saying goes, is in the eye of the beholder- an indication of the subjective nature of this criteria. The design of ballfield facilities is first guided by the requirements of the rules of the game(s), and secondly by the realities of the engineering required to construct and maintain them. It is the edges, where we integrate the engineered feature into the surrounding landscape, the ambiguity begins. These edges should be designed with an understanding of the broader visual and psychological effects of each change proposed. The site should be viewed holistically as part of a larger context. It is a park within a park, and within a densely populated neighborhood. Attention should be paid to details as they relate to the existing surroundings and the greater landscape in which they lie.

Landmark Status

Bobby Morris Playfield and the Lincoln Reservoir site (collectively referred to as Cal Anderson Park) received designation as an “historic landscape, park or site” by City Council Ordinance in 2002. The Landmarks Preservation Board will have an opportunity to review and comment on the Parks Departments proposal. Parks will consider its proposals in the context of the original planning for the site by the Olmsted Brothers, circa 1904, and other major developments on the site in the years since.